

Boise County Courthouse
Northeast corner of Main and Wall Streets
Idaho City
Boise County
Idaho

HABS No. ID-11

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. ID-11

BOISE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Location: Northeast corner of Main and Wall Streets,
Idaho City, Boise County, Idaho.

Latitude: 43° 49' 42" Longitude: 115° 49' 155".

Present Owner: Boise County.

Present Occupant: Boise County Offices.

Present Use: County Courthouse and offices.

Significance: As an excellent example of fire prevention measure, the "brick" was built to be fireproof in 1873 following Idaho City's most destructive fires in 1865, 1867, 1868 and 1871. It is also the most formal and best crafted institutional building in Idaho City.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Construction began in July 1853 and was completed in October 1873.
 2. Architect: Unknown.
 3. Original and subsequent owners: The Boise County Courthouse stands on Lots 1 and 2 of Block J, and part of Lot 5, Block B of the town-site of Idaho City Plat of 1915. Reference is made to the title in the Deed Records located in the Boise County Recorder and Auditor's Office, 412 Main, Idaho City, Idaho. (Incomplete chain of title)
- 1880 Deed, April 8, 1880, recorded in Deed Record 15, pp. 5-6.
C.S. and E.A. Kingsley to Jonas Brown for \$5,000.
- 1882 Deed, May 11, 1882, recorded in Deed Record 15, pp. 285-286.
Jonas Brown to John Kenally for \$2,500.
- 1898 Deed, May 11, 1898, recorded in Deed Record 20 pp. 255-257.
John and Eliza Kenally to William A. Coughamour, John Myers and Isadore Schmidt for \$6,000.

- 1899 Deed, February 28, 1899, recorded in Deed Record 20 pp. 505-507. Hannah Schmidt and John Myers, Executors for the estate of Isadore Schmidt, deceased, William A. and Galina Coughamour, John and Emma Myers to Mary Orchard for \$1,5000. (sic)
- 1909 Deed, January 16, 1909, recorded in Deed Record 32, p. 167. Mary Orchard to Boise County for \$1,000.
- 1915 Deed, September 21, 1915, recorded in Deed Record 41, p. 85. John H. Myer, Probate Judge, to Boise County Lots 1 and 2, Block J, and part of Lot 5, Block B, as designated in the Idaho City Townsite Plat.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: According to the Idaho World, John Wallace took the contract for the brick work. (Idaho World, August 28, 1873). Stuck and Martial, carpenters, laid the flooring. (Idaho World, September 18, 1873). I.H. Winfrey did the plastering, Johnny Runyan, the painting, and G.T. Keys, the awning and the side-walks. (Idaho World, October 2, 1873).
5. Original plan and construction: No plans survive. The building was originally constructed as a block of two store buildings. The bricks were fired locally, and the mortar was local clay as well. The metal doors were freighted from San Francisco.
6. Alterations and additions: On May 18, 1909, the County Commissioners instructed the clerk to obtain bids for the building of a "cement wall 8 1/2 feet high, one foot thick and 17 feet long, and also for a concrete floor 17 feet by 32 feet to be 4 inches thick in basement of the Courthouse, and...for constructing new porches and walks along the East, North and West of the Courthouse, the County to furnish all materials for porches and walks." [Proceedings of the County Commissioners, May 18, 1909, Bk. 6, p. 330 in Boise County Recorder and Auditor's Office, 412 Main, Idaho City.] Although his bid was officially rejected, James Fox probably did some of the work, for which he was paid \$72 "for labor on the Courthouse" on October 11, 1909, and \$278 for the same work a year later. The walkways on the south and west sides were built. Two chimneys on the west wall were removed, and replaced by a new chimney in the center of the roof.

After 1909, additional alterations and additions were built over the years. The angle of the shed roof on the covered walk on the north side was increased. The original board and batten siding on the gable ends of the roof was replaced with clapboard siding. The window openings in the north, south and west sides are all additions. The wooden walk on four sides of the building has been restored several times, and the soffit of the roof under the walk has been replaced. Tie rods were installed to support the east and west sides of the building. Loose roof members from the roof truss were removed and re-used to hold installations of electrical wiring (knob and tube type) in the attic. The brick walls in the basement were plastered with cement plaster, and the original basement floor was replaced with a concrete

floor. In 1962 the brick and earth fill that supported the roof in the attic area was removed. The interior walls and ceilings were wallpapered.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The present brick courthouse on Main and Wall Streets was built in 1873 as a general store operated by the Reverend C.S. Kingsley, a Methodist minister and a successful businessman. A "Mechanic's Ball" marked the grand opening of the new store which the Idaho World described as "one of the largest and most commodious fireproof buildings to be found this side of Portland..." (Idaho World, July 24, 1873). The newspaper also deemed the ball as a "huge success." Approximately seventy men and thirty-five women attended the ball.

The store was sold in 1880 to John Kenally, a miner, tinsmith and merchant, and was used as a hardware store. Later, the building was rented to Alex and Mary Orchard who converted it into a hotel. Mary Orchard bought the building in 1899. In 1909, Boise County bought the building, and changed it into a courthouse.

The Reverend C.S. Kingsley, the first owner of the building, came to the Boise Basin from Portland, Oregon in September 1863. In the late 1860s he had a general store, specializing in custom made boots and shoes on Wall Street, a short distance from the present courthouse. This store was seriously damaged in a disastrous fire on May 17, 1867, but it was immediately rebuilt with fireproof brick. Besides his duties as a Methodist minister --- in the early years Idaho City had a Methodist congregation -- and as a businessman, he allegedly organized the local vigilante movement. After that, Kingsley went to Portland, Oregon to write for the Pacific Christian Advocate.

The original offices of the Boise County Courthouse were housed in a pine frame building that still stands on Montgomery Street. Built in 1864, its distant location enabled the courthouse to escape Idaho City fires in 1865, 1867, 1868 and 1871. In 1909 the old courthouse became obsolete for use as county offices, and the county bought the present courthouse on Main and Wall Streets. Today the former courthouse is used as storage quarters for the county equipment.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views:

- a. A photocopy of old photo shows a general view of the Boise Basin Courthouse, circa turn of the 20th century. Original photograph at Boise Basin Museum, Idaho City, Idaho. Included in the HABS collection.
- b. A photocopy of old photo shows the original courthouse on Montgomery Street. Original photo at Idaho Historical Society, Boise, Idaho. Included in the HABS field records.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Crowley, Ariel. "About the Courthouse," typescript.

Deed Books, County Recorder and Auditor's Office,
Idaho City, Idaho.

Interview: Ariel Crowley, Idaho City, Idaho, June 1974.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Adams, Francis. Idaho City, Queen of the Gold Camps.
Idaho City: Idaho World, 1953.

Byrd, Annie Laurie. Boise, The Peace Valley. Caldwell:
Caxton, 1934.

Elliott's History of Idaho. San Francisco: Elliott, 1884;
reprint, Fairfield, 1971.

Idaho World. Newspaper articles, 1865-1874. Idaho City, Idaho.

Boise News. Newspaper articles .

Prepared by Alan Minskoff
Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer 1979

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The "brick" was originally constructed as a block of two store buildings. The building was also built to be fire resistant with brick and earth fill in the attic and metal shutters on the original openings to keep fire out. It is the only building with a refined exterior appearance in this rugged mining town.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This rectangular brick block is approximately 45' (five-bay front) x 70'.

2. Foundations: The foundations are stone and brick, and are in fair condition.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The walls are constructed of locally low-fired bricks. The brick has been painted red on the east, west and north walls of the building. The painting has aided in the preservation of the mortar which is a local clay with no additives. The gable ends have clapboard siding painted white.
4. Structural system, framing: The building has brick bearing wall construction with a wooden frame roof, ceiling, and floor construction. The floor construction is typical of the 19th century building methods. The ceiling structure has the standard joist construction with fire-cut ends in brick pockets. A 2"x12" has been scabbed alongside each joist, and the upper portion of these pieces have been cut on a radius so the center section of this piece is much higher than the ends. There are board and battens on these members, and it creates two shallow vault forms running east and west, springing at the outside walls, reaching an apex in the center span, and receding in height until they meet the bearing wall running through the building. Four inches of earth over a layer of brick were placed over these vaults in the attic as a fire precaution measure. The brick and earth are now removed.

The roof trusses are unusual with large hand hewn wooden sections on the bearing walls, tied top and bottom, and cross-braced with sawn dimension sections. The connectors in the wood are square nails and square spikes. Metal tie rods extend across the building in the attic, and are connected at the top of the brick walls with bolts and circular steel plates approximately 12" in diameter. The tie rods are semi-circular and have been forged welded to create the needed lengths.

5. Covered walkway: There is a covered boardwalk on all four sides of the building. There are evenly spaced wooden columns which support the shed roofs on the north and south sides and the roof extension on the east and west sides. The soffit of the roof covering is wood painted white.
6. Chimney: In the center of the roof is a brick chimney, which is an addition to the building.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Five pairs of double French doors line the front elevation. The entrance doors in the center of this elevation each have ten lights, as are the doors on the extreme westernmost and easternmost sides. The remaining two pairs of double doors, on either side of the central doors, each have six lights. All doors have single bottom panels. Two-light transoms are on top of the three doors on the easternmost side of the front elevation.

All doors are recessed to allow bi-folding metal shutters to stack alongside the openings. One door on the west (rear) side of the building is original and is a paneled door with one light. Two doors on the south side are additions. A basement door is on the north side of the block, accessible through a trap door in the boardwalk. This door is a metal clad wooden door. Another basement door on the east side is similar in design to the bi-folding metal shutters on the front doors, and is accessible through a trapdoor in the boardwalk.

- b. Windows and shutters: The windows, which are not original in all four sides of the building, are one-over-one double-hung sash windows. The window on the northernmost side of the west elevation replaced an original door which has been bricked in from the floor line to the window sill. There is evidence of one window in the basement's west side that has been bricked in. A two-over-two double-hung sash window occupies either gable end. Three unmatched metal shutters cover the windows in the north elevation.

- 8. Roof: A gable roof covers the main building. The shed roofs cover the covered walks on the north and south sides. All roofs are covered with corrugated, galvanized steel roofing.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: There is a full basement under the building, and it is divided in two parts by the brick bearing wall running east-west through the building. The first part of the basement on the south side has a small toilet room at the foot of the stairway and numerous small county records storage rooms constructed since 1953. The second part of the basement on the north side is accessible through a doorway in the bearing wall, and it contains an open space housing the furnace.
- b. First floor: The main entrances to various rooms are through the sets of double doors in the east side of the building. The County Sheriff's Office occupies the space directly behind the northernmost two sets of doors. The center set of double doors opens into a vestibule which leads directly into the courtroom. The southernmost two sets of doors open directly into the County Assessor's Offices which are also accessible from a doorway in the south side of the building. The primary access to the Judge's Chambers is through the westernmost door in the south side of the building. This door also leads to the corridor, with a basement stairway at the south wall of the Judge's Chambers. On the east wall of the corridor, across from the Judge's Chambers, is a doorway leading to the Clerk of Court Office. Access to the Office of the Prosecuting Attorney is gained through the door of the Clerk of Court Office. Access to the courtroom is gained through the door at the end of the corridor.

2. Stairway: A stairway exists as an access to the basement from the south corridor into the Judge's Chambers. There is evidence, from the floor framing, of another basement access stair from what is now the courtroom.
3. Flooring: The floors are covered with sheet vinyl and linoleum.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are plaster with wallpaper coverings.
5. Doors: The doors are paneled with simple wooden trim.
6. Trim: The courtroom has a rail with turned wooden posts and a simple wooden top rail.
7. Hardware: The original hardware still exists on the sets of double doors and two of the single exterior doors.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: The building is heated by an oil fired furnace with ducts to all principal rooms.
 - b. Lighting: There is incandescent lighting throughout the building.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building faces east and is located on the northeast corner of the intersection of Main and Wall Streets. A water pump is at the northeast corner, under the covered walk.
2. Historic landscape design: One large locust tree is located at the southeast corner of the building.

Prepared by William B. McCroskey
Project Director
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer 1974

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Idaho City project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), in cooperation with the Idaho Bicentennial Commission in the summer of 1974. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed by William B. McCroskey (University of Idaho), the project director; Alan Minskoff (University of Chicago), the project historian; Jack W. Schafer (University of Cincinnati), the project foreman, and the student assistant architects, Rae F. Noritake (University of Idaho), Laurence Ferar (University of Oregon), and Mark T. Wellen (Texas Tech University). William Klein, a HABS staff architect in the Washington office, edited the drawings in 1975. The written architectural and historical data was edited in April 1980 by Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington office. The documentary photographs were made by Duane Garrett in 1976.